



The CUET mandate warrants cautious implementation

- Central universities may have been caught unawares when the University Grants Commission, or UGC (which looks into the 'coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of university education in India'), made it mandatory this year for them to admit students in their undergraduate programmes solely on the basis and merit of scores in the Central University Entrance Test (CUET).
- The UGC ought to have taken universities into confidence and given due consideration to their concerns
- Central universities, apparently, have no option but to follow the mandate.
- The idea of academic autonomy and the argument that formalisation, uniformity, and standardisation often pull down quality to the lowest common denominator are unlikely to impress. The odds are stacked against them.

CUET Advantages:

1. The arguments that entrance tests undermine the importance of board examinations and distract students from their studies in schools were given a goodbye a long time ago by the central universities themselves. Most admit students on the basis of their own entrance tests, often programme by programme.
2. The CUET may find favour with students for it might widen their academic choices and save them the cost, the hassle and the inconvenience of attempting many different tests, though they might realise later that the Central Board of Secondary Education-based test may pose a huge disadvantage to an overwhelmingly large number of students from the State Boards.

Respecting autonomy

1. This is not to argue that the CUET is the best method. World-class universities and the countries in which they are situated do not insist on admitting students singularly on the quantitative score of a common test.
2. Instead, respecting the idea of academic autonomy, they grant their faculty the freedom to evolve holistic criteria for admission.

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3. The NEP 2020 too while mentioning the need for 'a common principle for entrance examination' had emphasised the point that it should be done 'with due regard to the diversity and university autonomy'.
4. Further, the policy mentions in no uncertain terms that 'it would be left to the individual universities and colleges to use NTA assessments for their admissions'.
5. It would have certainly been better, and in good taste, had the UGC taken the universities into confidence and given due consideration to their concerns.
6. As the UGC contemplates making the CUET mandatory for admission in all higher educational institutions across the country, it must realise that the anxieties, compulsions, concerns and realities of the State sector may be very different.
7. Besides, higher education is on the concurrent list and, thus, a joint responsibility of the Union and State governments warrants that the States are taken into confidence before their institutions are subjected to a single common entrance test.